










# Activities for Parents to Encourage Positive Brain Development

What's Going On With Your Baby	What Activities You Can Do
<b>Fine Motor Skills</b> Fine motor skills refer to those skills that require smaller muscle groups, like using fingers and thumbs to grasp. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Select a variety of toys for your baby to shake, bang, palm, grasp, dump and pass between hands. Offering different toys will encourage your baby to use their hands and fingers in different ways.</li><li>Find different balls with different textures and allow your baby to hold each one. Allow your baby to explore with hands and mouth.</li><li>Use 3-4 piece knob puzzles to help your toddler take the pieces out and try to fit it back into the base. Point out the pictures on the base.</li><li>Using play dough, allow your child to press cookie cutter shapes into the dough. Show them how to twist their wrist to release the dough. After several shapes are removed, have your child try to put the shapes back into the outlines.</li></ul> 
<b>Gross Motor Skills</b> Gross motor skills refer to those large group muscles, such as using legs for running and playing, or arms to catch a ball. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Have several hats available, and put one on while sitting across from your baby. Make silly faces and put the hat on your baby's head. Allow your baby to remove it and play with the other hats, allowing them to crawl, stretch and use their arm muscles.</li><li>Put out a large inflatable plastic ring and put a few toys in the middle. Encourage your toddler to climb into the tube to play with the toys.</li><li>Blow bubbles outside and encourage your child to chase the bubbles. Move around so your child needs to stretch, jump and reach to get the bubbles.</li><li>Set out a large box or laundry basket to make a car and encourage your toddler to take their favorite toys and push them in it. Don't be surprised if they want to climb in and get a ride!</li><li>Ask your child to imitate the motions of various animals using their whole bodies. Encourage big movements, like trunks swaying or running fast.</li></ul> 
<b>Visual Learning</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Place a small, unbreakable mirror where your baby can see themselves during regular routines, such as diaper changing or feeding. Talk to your baby about what they see in the mirror. Tell your baby what you see in the mirror, such as their pretty eyes or smiling mouth. Ask your baby to point to themselves when they see their face in the mirror.</li><li>Hide some familiar objects around the room, and walk with your toddler trying to help them locate the objects. Name each object as you search for it.</li><li>Take a clear plastic jar with a lid and fill it with small objects, such as pasta from alphabet soup. Fill the remainder of the jar with black beans, and seal the top. Shake the jar and encourage your child to find each letter or object through the side of the jar.</li><li>Make a paper chain of two alternating colors of construction paper. Cut strips of paper and ask your child to copy the pattern you made. Add other colors and other patterns to make this more and more difficult.</li></ul> 
<b>Music/Auditory</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Use an oatmeal box to create a small drum. Sit down near your baby and make small tapping sounds on your drum. Encourage your baby to crawl toward the sounds. Invite your baby to help you make sounds.</li><li>Record your child's voice making sounds or basic words and let them hear the way it sounds played back.</li></ul> 

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assign a different musical selection to different parts of the day to establish routine. The repetition of it will help your child make connections to what activity is coming next.</li> <li>To the beat of a musical piece, make patterns your child can hear. Ask your child to close their eyes as they identify and copy your sounds. Start simple with words like “clap, snap” and then as your child catches on, add other sounds such as stomp and whistle.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Language</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>From the time your baby is born, talk with them about everything they do. Give words to all the parts of their world.</li> <li>Make a box to look like a barn. Add plastic animals in the box and show your child each animal as you name it. “Here is a cow. Can you say cow?” Then ask your child to find each animal as you ask for the name.</li> <li>Hide a small object in the room, and talk about all of the places it could be. Use preposition words like over, under, on, in, etc. to describe the places where the object might be while you help to find it.</li> <li>As your child is playing with different toys, ask them to describe the toy. Help your child extend their vocabulary by adding adjectives like pointy, fluffy, soft or shiny.</li> <li>Play music with child-friendly lyrics during playtimes for more exposure to language.</li> </ul> 
<p><b>Literacy</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hold your baby in your lap while you look at pictures and read stories. Talk about what you see and encourage your baby to touch the book and point to pictures.</li> <li>Create a book area for your toddler using board, cloth, plastic, and other sturdy books. Use a rug or some pillows to make a cozy area.</li> <li>Create story boxes out of shoeboxes to include a book and some toys that relate to that book. Use these to reinforce learning with the book.</li> <li>Stop by local businesses and collect items with the business’ logo on it. Show your child one logo at a time as ask if they know where the logo comes from. Try to “read” each logo together.</li> <li>Read with your child daily, even if your child brings the same book each night. The repetition will enforce reading skills. Add new titles to the mix along the way for greater exposure to literary works.</li> <li>Use puppets to tell a familiar story such as goldilocks or the three little pigs. Change your voice for each character, and encourage your child to as well.</li> <li>Play audio books during times in the car for your child to listen to and enjoy.</li> </ul> 
<p><b>Tactile/Sensory Development</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce “touchy-feely” books to your infant as you read stories. Move your baby’s hand along the various textures as you describe each one. “This is soft. Feel how soft this is?”</li> <li>Take your baby outside and let them explore in a safe area. Hang a birdfeeder, and sit together on a blanket and watch the birds. Blow bubbles and allow your baby to try to catch them. Tie streamers to a tree and watch them blow in the breeze. Let your baby crawl on a safe part of the grass and feel the grass with their hands and feet.</li> <li>Fill a plastic bucket with damp sand. Invite your child to explore the sand with their fingers. Show your child how to draw circles and shapes with her fingers, and how to make the writing disappear with a swipe of her hand.</li> <li>Using a child-sized table with a washable surface, put a small amount of washable paint directly on the table and then cover the whole table with plastic wrap. Allow your toddler to “paint” by moving his hands around the plastic wrap.</li> <li>Make play dough for creative play. Add different items to your dough to create interesting textures. Items might include glitter, or sand, or add different scents such as lemon or mint extract or a few drops of scented bath oil.</li> </ul> 



## Social/Emotional Development



- Encourage your baby to wave to other people when riding in the cart at the grocery store.
- Sit feet-to-feet with legs apart with your toddler. Push balls of different sizes back and forth, and then increase the distance between you. Discuss how you are sharing the ball.
- Encourage your child to express themselves freely and creatively with art materials. To encourage creative expression, try to introduce projects where your child can't copy what the adult has made.
- Look at your child eye-to-eye as you speak to them.
- Invite others to read stories with your child.



## Mealtimes



- Offer your baby a spoon as soon as they are old enough to sit in a high chair. Your baby will begin making brain connections that the spoon is a part of mealtimes before they are actually ready to use it.
- Offering age appropriate foods with different textures allows your baby to use multiple senses to discover their world. Finger foods offer textures for babies to explore using their hands and mouth.
- Put a spoon and napkin out for mealtimes with your toddler. Offer gelatin cubes and help put a cube on the spoon. Point out how the Jello jiggles on the spoon and encourage your toddler to try to eat it from the spoon.
- Offer snacks which can be counted during snack time. As you give each item, count it with your toddler, and encourage them to do the same.
- Create snacks together and allow your child help with the preparation. One example is to have your child use plastic knives to cut up bananas or strawberries to add to plain yogurt, or to spread peanut butter onto crackers or apple slices.



## Hand Games



- With a small scarf or blanket, sit while holding your baby and put the scarf over your eyes. Say, "Where's Mommy? Peek-a-boo!" Then put the scarf quickly over your baby's eyes and do the same thing. You will know that your baby is ready for this activity when they smile or giggle as the scarf is put over a face.
- Act out simple actions without using your voice and have your child try to guess what you are doing. Actions could include brushing your teeth, going to bed, getting dressed, etc.
- Play the "itsy bitsy spider" or other finger games. Encourage your child to do the movements with you and to make up some new movements.
- Using the song, "If you're happy and you know it", fill in the blanks with parts of the body, like "touch your head," or "touch your nose." Sing the song for your toddler and help them follow each step.



## Toy Games



- Find or make a puppet that has eyes and a mouth. Call your baby's name and try to get their attention. Offer simple commands to your baby through the puppet, such as "Can you touch the puppet's nose?" or "Can you wave to the puppet?"
- Set out baskets with different types of toys in each one, such as animals, cars, and blocks. As your toddler explores the baskets, help them name each item, and talk about the item. "The car says vroom! The blocks stack high!"
- Sit with your child and help to stack blocks. Encourage your child to stack with you. Add different types of blocks for a variety of surfaces.
- Use old cell phones with batteries removed to play "phone." Have a conversation with your child using open-ended questions to encourage your child to talk.

